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ABSTRACT

There is no need to create a new curriculum in heritage education. Rather, there is an imperative to use the existing curriculum more effectively, to infuse it with the best content on U.S. history and culture, including models of the built environment that embody and reflect the values, aspirations, and achievements of preceding generations. There are at least five pitfalls that heritage educators must avoid, however: (1) Elitism is an overemphasis on the dominant political and social figures in the past that excludes the heritage of the majority of people. (2) Extreme pluralism is an overemphasis on diversity. Such an approach would foster ethnic group separatism and divisiveness in society and diminish national unity and identity. (3) Localism refers to an overriding concern with the history and culture of particular places and promotes parochialism at the expense of cosmopolitanism. (4) Romanticism in heritage education refers to an indiscriminate and uncritical education about the nation's history and culture, which overlooks the blemishes of the past. (5) Anti-intellectualism stems from an overemphasis on experiential learning. Avoidance of these pitfalls can open the way to cultural literacy for students, knowledge of key facts and ideas of a human community needed for intelligent and fruitful participation in the community. Cultural literacy can be enhanced by visiting historic sites. In this way abstractions of the past can be linked to tangible forms of the present, and empathy for people of the past is encouraged. The use of historic landmarks to foster cultural literacy is one of the strongest justifications for historic preservation and heritage education. (JB)

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HERITAGE EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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HERITAGE EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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Heritage is a hot word in the lexicon of educators and historians. According to historian Michael Kammen, "...the popularity and pervasiveness of this 'buzzword' in the United States is becoming utterly astounding."[1] Various individuals and groups in this country have lately been expressing great interest in heritage and in heritage education.

When talking or writing about heritage, we commonly refer to an inheritance, to our cultural legacy from preceding generations. Heritage education, therefore, typically refers to transmission of this culture to youngsters of each successor generation. Indeed, heritage education--induction of young folks into the national literate culture--is fundamentally what schools are about--in the United States and in other countries around the world.[2]

In a general sense, then, heritage education is what the public expects of schools, and when the schools fail to deliver it, critics respond harshly. The current wave of school reform involves a massive outpouring of concern about masses of disinherited students, those who have not adequately acquired the heritage the critics want to impart to them. And at the center of the ongoing debate about

curriculum priorities are disagreements about the substance of the legacy that students should acquire in school.

If many of us view heritage education as virtually coterminous with general education for citizenship, others define it more narrowly, with reference to more particular objectives of teaching and learning. For example, the National Council for Preservation Education emphasizes "historic environments, and the individual homes, schools, farms, factories, churches, and commercial blocks that comprise them," as primary settings for teaching and learning.[3] The NCPE says:

> Heritage education programs introduce the built environment directly into the education process at the elementary-secondary level in arts, humanities, science and vocational courses. They focus primarily on older and historic man-made structures and environments, promoting their use in curriculum as visual resources for teaching knowledge and skills, as artifacts for the study of a continuum of cultures, and as real and actual places that students of all ages can experience, study, and evaluate first hand.[4]

Historians, too, see the concept of heritage, and therefore, heritage education, as central to the teaching and learning of their discipline. Michael Kammen, for example, says:

> 'Heritage' as we have known it is not necessarily history, but the <u>whole</u> of history... is heritage. The great imperative, therefore, for schools and teachers, textbook writers and curriculum developers, docents and educators at museums and historic sites, is to remember that heritage...isn't an alternative to history, or a surrogate for it, but a prologue and a preparation for...[studies of the] pasts...that produced the present (warts and all).[5]

These distinct but complementary conceptions of heritage education, both the broad and narrow ones, can readily be connected to the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools, especially to standard courses in the social studies, such as history, geography, and civics, and to subjects in the humanities and fine arts, such as literature, music, and architecture. There is no need to create a new curriculum in heritage education. Rather, there is the imperative to use the curriculum we have more effectively, to infuse it with the best content on our history and culture, including exemplars of the built environment that embody and reflect the values, aspirations, and achievements of our ancestors, our genealogical and our cultural forefathers.

The goals and content of heritage education, then, can be a powerful pedagogical force in the ongoing reform of elementary and secondary schools. However, there are at least five pitfalls to avoid, if educators would make the most of their opportunities to infuse the best content, including the appropriate exemplars of the built environment, into the core curriculum of our schools, the learning experiences that all students are expected to have in common. What are these pitfalls? Why are they dangerous obstacles in the way of our mission in heritage education? How can we avoid them to stay on track and achieve our goals?

The five dangerous obstacles in our way are

1) the pitfall of elitism,

2) the pitfall of extreme pluralism,

3) the pitfall of localism,

4) the pitfall of romanticism, and

5) the pitfall of anti-intellectualism.

The pitfall of elitism is an overemphasis on the dominant political and social figures in our past and a corresponding underemphasis on the underside of history, where we can uncover the common folks in our collective heritage. Elitism in heritage education excludes the heritage of most of us and creates a one-sided and distorted picture of our culture and society that is based on the values, interests, concerns, and achievements of a few very prominent Americans.

If we fall into the trap of elitism, we promote a false sense of cultural uniformity that denies or ignores the rich, multi-faceted diversity in our past and present. And we risk alienating and boring the majority of our students, who may find it difficult to identify with a strictly elitist version of our history and culture. The prominent social historian Gary Nash points out that "the history of any society cannot be properly understood without taking account of the activities of all its constituent parts, which means people of all classes, regions, and conditions."[6] Heritage education, properly conceived, treats the splendid variety of heritages

in our history and current society.

Louis Adamic, an immigrant writer of the 1940s, accurately perceived his new American heritage as an ongoing, unfinished blending of various heritages: "The pattern of America is all of a piece; it is a blend of cultures from many lands, woven of threads from many corners of the world. Diversity itself is the pattern, is the stuff and color of the fabric."[7]

Like Adamic, many social group leaders and educators have appropriately accentuated cultural diversity and social pluralism in the United States. Unlike, Adamic, however, some of them have taken extreme positions, which leads us to the second pitfall in the path of heritage education.

Extreme pluralism, the second pitfall, is an overemphasis on the diversity, the heterogeneity that distinguishes our United States. Heritage education in the United States must be plural, with fitting emphasis on the various heritages that comprise our pluralistic society. However, some educators would stress diversity and pluralism to a fault, perhaps in response to the faulty underemphasis on these ideas in the past. And they would practically deny the existence of a national heritage that all Americans, regardless of their differences, have in common.

Extreme pluralism in heritage education would foster ethnic group separatism and divisiveness in society and

diminish national unity and identity. Social diversity would loom much larger than social unity in the curriculum in disregard of a long-standing civic principle of our republic: unity with diversity. And a new ethnic chauvinism would emerge in place of the old national chauvinism associated with elitist conceptions of heritage education.[8]

Certainly there is persistent tension and sometimes overt conflict between the values of unity and diversity in our society, but heritage education, properly conceived, must honor both. It will uphold the validity of a common history, culture, and heritage to which all persons have access and with which all can identify. It will also acknowledge and honor the efforts of diverse minority groups to preserve and enhance their own identities, their distinctive and diverse heritages within the overarching American heritage that all can share in some meaningful way. The key idea is to avoid polar positions in curriculum debates and to focus instead on how to blend and balance unity and diversity in heritage education, how to teach respect for both national and ethnic identities as worthy goals, which different persons will accept in different degrees.

It should be normal and natural for Americans of various heritages to echo these words of the prize-winning writer, Richard Rodriguez: "I am brown and of Mexican ancestors, one generation into this country. I claim Thomas Jefferson as a cultural forefather."[9]

According to the historian Michael Kammen, heritage education "has the great virtue of accentuating the common core of values, institutions, and experiences that Americans have shared, and to which newcomers have accommodated in the process of becoming Americans. Undeniably, many aspects of the heritage phenomenon provide the glue that holds us all together."[10]

Localism, the third pitfall in the path of sound heritage education, is the antithesis of Michael Kammen's point about "the great virtue of accentuating the common core of values, institutions, and experiences that Americans have shared...." Localism refers to an overriding concern with the history and culture of particular places and a corresponding neglect of the larger communities within which these local places fit. Localism in heritage education promotes parochialism at the expense of cosmopolitanism; it limits the vision, the horizons of learners instead of expanding them, as good education is supposed to do.

My warning about the pitfall of localism certainly is not an argument against local history and culture in the curriculum. On the contrary, the student's first meaningful experiences in heritage education are likely to be associated with the built environment of his or her neighborhood or town. Furthermore, the resources of local history and culture are readily available to teachers and learners and represent a

living laboratory for studies of culture in the past and present, especially the material culture.

Last weekend, I visited Vincennes, Indiana, a community founded by French traders in 1732, which is a treasure-chest of resources for the study of local history and culture, and thereby an important site for ongoing programs in heritage education. Vincennes, for example, was the site of the decisive battle in the western theater of our American War of Independence, and an impressive monument to George Rogers Clark marks the spot where this Virginian, Colonel Clark, received the surrender of the British commander, Henry Hamilton. In 1800, Vincennes became the capital of the newly established Indiana Territory (a vast region encompassing the present-day states of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin), and it was the residence of the territorial governor, another Virginian named William Henry Harrison. It was under an historic oak tree in Vincennes that Harrison met and argued with the Shawnee leader, Tecumseh, and it was from Fort Knox, overlooking Vincennes from the high banks of the Wabash River, that Harrison led his troops north to attack Tecumseh's village at the intersection of the Tippecanoe and Wabash Rivers. Vincennes today is filled with artifacts and historic structures and sites, significant elements in a material culture of the past that still loom large in the present.

However, lessons on the local history and culture of

places like Vincennes are flawed, if they are treated in isolation from the larger history and culture of a state, Indiana, of a region, the Middle West, and of a nation-state, the United States of America. Rather, we should think of localities like Vincennes as the poet Dante thought of his community, Florence. He wrote: "My country [community] is the whole world!"[11] Of course, he meant that cultural universals could be found in that local place known as Florence. Likewise, universals in the human experience are embedded in the material culture, the built environments of local communities across the United States, places like Vincennes, where the local history and culture can be connected to events and themes in regional history, national, history, and even world history.

Romanticism, the fourth pitfall in the path of heritage education, has all too often been the outcome of teaching and learning about the broad significance of local communities in the larger histories of nations and world regions. Romanticism in heritage education refers to an indiscriminate and uncritical education about our history and culture, which overlooks the blemishes, the ugly or unhappy elements in our past, and dwells instead only on the glories, some of them fabricated, of the past. Romanticism is the flaw of accentuating the positive to the complete neglect of the negative in our history and culture. This pitfall, of course,

is a trap that must be avoided by all teachers of culture and history at all levels--local, regional, national, and international.

Romantic and unrealistic treatments of our history and culture usually involve selective omission of information rather than blatant falsehood. In local programs of heritage education, a community may suffer from collective amnesia, a lack of memory about certain unhappy subjects. Visitors to Vincennes, Indiana, for example, are not likely to be exposed to ugly facts about slavery in this outpost of the Old Northwest--a territory closed to involuntary servitude, or so proclaimed that hallowed charter of freedom, the justly celebrated Ordinance of 1787. However, in the U.S. Government census of 1800, the population of Vincennes was reported as follows: males, 373; females, 333; slaves, 8; total = 714.[12] Slavery was an ugly, if limited, reality north and west of the Ohio River, no matter what the law said or what perpetrators of romanticism in history have proclaimed.

This kind of selective treatment of facts, to emphasize the postive and to overlook the negative, is not so unusual, as indicated by careful examination of history textbooks used in schools.[13] Local historical societies and education programs at historic sites are also too often tainted by this sort of sanitised presentation of our heritage.[14] I do not recommend that we accentuate the negative, that heritage education should become primarily an expose of ugly truths.

But I strongly urge avoidance of romantic illusions, and to do this we must open the whole past to examination by our students, not merely those parts of it that make us feel good about ourselves and our ancestors.

Anti-intellectualism, the fifth and final pitfall in heritage education, is often intertwined with romanticism. Anti-intellectualism is also displayed in programs that are designed primarily to serve commercial or promotional interests and secondarily, if at all, to achieve legitimate educational goals. But these examples of anti-intellectualism are obvious and easily avoided by committed educators.

The true pitfall is the more deceptive case of anti-intellectualism that stems from overemphasis on experiential or "hands-on" learning. Students certainly respond favorably to direct contact with interesting historic sites or intriguing museum exhibits. There is no substitute for the immediacy and reality of being on the scene, of seeing and touching objects in the material culture of our forebears. However, teachers must be careful to recognize the limitations as well as the obvious benefits of experiential learning. It is fallacious to presume that history and culture experienced directly through objects in the built environment are intrinsically more educative than history and culture confronted via the printed page.

An overemphasis on experiential learning in heritage

education, to the exclusion or even minimization of printed learning materials, is inevitably anti-intellectual and miseducative.

Sound heritage education combines cognition and direct sensory experience, academic abstractions and tangible realities, objects in the built environment and documents in the classroom. Certainly visits to historic sites, such as those in Vincennes, Indiana, can enliven education about the past as no classroom exercise can ever do. A visit to Grouseland, the great house of William Henry Harrison, from which he administered the Indiana Territory, can be an enriching educational experience about the values of a person and of the era he represented. However, to avoid the pitfall of anti-intellectualism, teachers must carefully prepare students to make the most of their visit to an historic site such as Grouseland. And they must engage learners in thoughtful follow-up lessons. These pre- and post-visit learning experiences should connect printed primary sources with the concrete primary sources in the historic site. By combining the intellectual with the experiential in heritage education, teachers will insure that students do not focus only on the trivial or sensational aspects of an historic site and that they will see connections between the historic site and larger ideas and trends in their history and culture.

It has been said that history never repeats itself, but historians often do. In confirmation of this adage, I will remind you that I have discussed five pitfalls that heritage educators must avoid, if they would provide the best content and learning experiences for students. I labelled these traps as follows:

- o the pitfall of elitism,
- o the pitfall of extreme pluralism,
- o the pitfall of localism,
- o the pitfall of romanticism, and
- o the pitfall of anti-intellectualism.

Avoidance of these pitfalls can open the way to cultural literacy for students, knowledge of key facts and ideas of a human community needed for intelligent and fruitful participation in the community. This prized outcome of heritage education, cultural literacy, is likely to be enhanced by moving beyond the printed pages of textbooks and documents to examination of the landmark sites that are the objects of historic preservation. In this way abstractions of the past can be linked to tangible forms of the present, and empathy for people of the past is encouraged.

When teachers are unable to take students directly to certain historic sites, because of the barriers of distance or limited budgets, they can use video programs and packets of photographs about these places. These video programs and photographs, as well as direct contact with sites, can be used

as primary sources of evidence on the past, in the same way that written primary sources are used in the classrooms of good history teachers, as sources of data to interpret, analyze, and evaluate.

The use of historic landmarks to foster cultural literacy is one of the strongest justifications for historic preservation and heritage education. This is especially so today when so many young Americans seem to be failing to learn the core values and knowledge that constitute the common memory, the unifying elements of our diverse society. The consequences of this failure could be severe for individuals and their society. Americans who lack cultural literacy are critically handicapped, as is the culture which may not survive a generation that fails to know and value it.

People without a solid sense of their past, a sense of identity rooted in time and space, are poorly equipped to face the future. Heritage education, if designed to avoid pitfalls that could thwart it, can help members of our successor generation to understand where they came from and where they should be going. If so, heritage education can enable our successors to create a future that is worthy of the best in their past. Let us resolve to do what we can to make it happen!

NOTES

1. Michael Kammen, "History Is Our Heritage: The Past in Contemporary American Culture," in Paul Gagnon and the Bradley Commission on History in Schools, eds., Historical Literacy: The Case for History in American Education (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 140.

2. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 18.

3. National Council for Preservation Education, A Heritage at Risk: A Report on Heritage Education (K-12) (Burlington, VT: Historic Preservation Program, 1987), 9.

4. Ibid., 4.

5. Michael Kammen, "History Is Our Heritage," 153-154.

6. Gary B. Nash, History for a Democratic Society: The Work of All the People," in Paul Gagnon and the Bradley Commission on History in Schools, eds., Historical Literacy: The Case for History in American Education (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 242.

7. Louis Adamic, A Nation of Nations (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 6.

8. Richard Nelson Current, "The 'New Ethnicity' and American History," in Richard Nelson Current, ed., Arguing With Historians: Essays on the Historical and the Unhistorical (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 162-173.

9. Richard Rodriguez, "What Is an American Education?" Education Week (9 September 1987): 44-45.

10. Michael Kammen, "History Is Our Heritage," 151.

11. Quoted in Michael Kammen, "Challenges and Opportunities in Writing State and Local History," in Michael Kammen, ed., Selvages & Biases: The Fabric of History in American Culture (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 162.

12. Hubbard Madison Smith, Historical Sketches of Old Vincennes (Vincennes, IN: Historical and Antiquarian Society, 1902), 273.

13. Paul Gagnon, Democracy's Half-Told Story: What American History Textbooks Should Add (Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, 1989).

14. Michael and Carol Kammen, "Uses and Abuses of the Past: A Bifocal Perspective," in Michael Kammen, ed., Selvages & Biases: The Fabric of History in American Culture (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 295-296.